

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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P R 100545Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4300
INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
USLO PEKING
AMEMBASSY TAIPEI
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 13331

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINR, PDIP, CH, US
SUBJECT: PRC AMBASSADOR CH'AI TSE-MIN

REF: PEKING 1151

1. PRC AMBASSADOR CH'AI TSE-MIN, SLATED TO HEAD THE PRC LIAISON OFFICE IN WASHINGTON, HAS HANDLED HIS RESPONSIBILITIES VERY SKILLFULLY DURING HIS ASSIGNMENT TO BANGKOK FROM JAN. 1976, TO THE PRESENT. AS THE FIRST PRC AMBASSADOR TO THAILAND, HE DEVELOPED FRIENDLY, PERSONAL RELATIONS WITH KEY THAI LEADERS, PARTICULARLY WITH FORMER PM KHUKRIT PRAMOT, FORMER FONMIN CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN, FORMER POLICE CHIEF PRASOERT RUCHIRAWONG, AND SIGNIFICANTLY WITH PM KRIANGSAK. HIS GOOD RELATIONS WITH PM KRIANGSAK ARE THOUGHT TO HAVE HELPED CONSIDERABLY IN PREPARING FOR AND CARRYING OUT THE
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SUCCESSFUL VISIT BY KRIANGSAK TO PEKING MARCH 29-APRIL 4.

2. ACCORDING TO MEMBERS OF THAI PARTY WHO ACCOMPANIED PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK TO PEKING, AMBASSADOR CH'AI WAS CLEARLY ON VERY FAMILIAR TERMS WITH SENIOR MEMBERS OF PEKING HIERARCHY. THE THAI OFFICIALS WERE PARTICULARLY IMPRESSED BY HIS SEEMING IMPORTANCE AND CREDIT HIM WITH HAVING MADE

THE PEKING VISIT A MAJOR SUCCESS.

3. CH'AI HAS BEEN SOLICITOUS AND PAID CLOSE ATTENTION TO THE DETAILS OF RELATIONS WITH KEY THAI FIGURES. HE HAS ALSO BEEN ADROIT IN CULTIVATING RELATIONS WITH THE LARGE CHINESE COMMUNITY IN THAILAND. RESPECTING THAI SENSITIVITIES ABOUT PRC INFLUENCE AMONG THE OVERSEAS CHINESE COMMUNITY, AMBASSADOR CH'AI INITIALLY REMAINED SOMEWHAT ALOOF FROM THE CHINESE COMMUNITY. HOWEVER, WITHIN THE PAST YEAR, AS THAI SENSITIVITIES ABATED, AND AS PEKING'S OVERSEAS CHINESE POLICY EVOLVED, CH'AI HAS SPENT CONSIDERABLY MORE TIME EXPANDING TIES WITH CHINESE IN THAILAND. IN RECENT MONTHS HE HAS RARELY MISSED A MAJOR CHINESE COMMUNITY FUNCTION. IN DEVELOPING RELATIONS WITH RTG FIGURES AND WITH OVERSEAS CHINESE, CH'AI HAS RELIED, APPARENTLY WITH FULL CONFIDENCE, ON TWO DEPUTIES, CHEN KO-HSIU AND YEH HSIANG-LING (AN INTEL AGENT), RESPECTIVELY, FOR THAI AND CHINESE AFFAIRS.

4. AMBASSADOR CH'AI OBVIOUSLY RECOGNIZED THE IMPORTANCE THE THAI ATTACH TO CEREMONY AND RITUAL. HE WAS PUNCTILIOUS IN ATTENDING CREMATIONS AND OTHER THAI FESTIVITIES. GIVEN THE IDEOLOGY HE REPRESENTS, HE WAS ALSO SURPRISINGLY FORTHCOMING IN THE ATTENTION HE PAID TO THE ROYAL FAMILY. CHINESE CULTURAL PRESENTATIONS WERE OFTEN MADE AVAILABLE AS BENEFITS FOR ROYAL CHARITIES, AND HE WENT TO CONSIDER-
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ABLE LENGTHS TO SHOW RESPECT FOR THE ROYAL FAMILY. THE U.S. EMBASSY MARVELLED AT HIS INVITATION TO A GAGGLE OF AGED PRINCES AND PRINCESSES OF NO POLITICAL CONSEQUENCE TO VISIT PEKING SOME MONTHS AGO. A SIMILAR INVITATION COULD NEVER HAVE BEEN FORTHCOMING FROM A WESTERN EMBASSY.

5. DURING THE PERIOD OF THE THANIN GOVERNMENT IN THAILAND (OCT. 1976 TO OCT. 1977) AMBASSADOR CH'AI FACED A VERY DIFFICULT TIME, AS THANIN MADE NO SECRET OF HIS STRONGLY ANTI-COMMUNIST VIEWS, BOTH IN PRIVATE AND IN PUBLIC STATEMENTS. FOR EXAMPLE, THANIN PROHIBITED THAI GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS FROM TRAVELLING TO THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA, AND HE TOYED WITH WAYS AND MEANS OF UPGRADING THE UNOFFICIAL REPRESENTATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA IN THAILAND. (THE ROC IS REPRESENTED BY FIVE MFA OFFICIALS NOMINALLY ASSIGNED TO THE CHINA AIRLINES OFFICE IN BANGKOK.) PUTTING THE BEST FACE POSSIBLE ON A SITUATION WHICH HE MUST HAVE FOUND DIFFICULT AND REFUSING TO TAKE AFFRONT, AMBASSADOR CH'AI AT THE SAME TIME MAINTAINED HIS CONTACTS WITH A WIDE CIRCLE OF THE THAI MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT. ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE RAPPORT HE HAD WITH THE MILITARY, THE THAI MILITARY TURNED OUT IN LARGE NUMBERS FOR A CELEBRA-

TION OF RED ARMY DAY AUG. 1, AND THE PRESS PROMINENTLY FEATURED THE GENERALS TOASTING AMBASSADOR CH'AI. CH'AI CONTINUED TO PROMOTE THE VISIT TO CHINA OF THAI GROUPS WHICH DID NOT REQUIRE PERMISSION FROM THE PRIME MINISTER, SUCH AS CONNECTIONS OF THE ROYAL FAMILY AND RETIRED MINISTERS AND GENERALS. IN AUGUST, 1977, AMBASSADOR CH'AI HAD ONE MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER THANIN, WHICH HE TERMED PRIVATELY AS UNPRODUCTIVE.

6. THERE ARE REPORTS THAT AT PREVIOUS POSTS AMBASSADOR CH'AI HAS APPEARED RIGID AND DOCTRINAIRE IN THIS THINKING. HE HAS CERTAINLY TOED THE OFFICIAL LINE WHEN ASKED HIS VIEWS ON MAJOR WORLD ISSUES. HE HAS EXPRESSED STANDARD ATTITUDES REGARDING TAIWAN AND TRADITIONAL CHINESE
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HOSTILITY TOWARD THE SOVIET UNION. PUBLICLY, HOWEVER, HE IS JOVIAL, FIRENDLY, GENERALLY ATTEMPTING TO DEFLECT CONTROVERSIAL QUESTIONS OF SUBSTANCE RATHER THAN EMERGE IN CONTENTIOUS DISCUSSION. WITH SENIOR U.S. EMBASSY OFFICIALS IN THE PAST SIX TO EIGHT MONTHS, HE HAS CLEARLY WELCOMED INFORMAL EXCHANGES AT DIPLOMATIC EVENTS. DURING THESE USUALLY SUPERFICIAL EXCHANGES, CH'AI HAS BEEN COMPLETELY AT EASE, MAKING JOKES EASILY AND CATCHING POINTS QUICKLY, DESPITE HIS CONTINUING RELIANCE ON AN INTERPRETER. HE HAS BEEN WILLING TO COMMENT (CAUTIOUSLY) ON SUBSTANTIVE MATTERS IN A PREDICTABLE BUT NON-POLEMICAL MANNER. WITH MOST OTHER DIPLOMATS HE IS ALSO FRIENDLY, EVEN FOR EXAMPLE WITH THE SOUTH KOREAN AMBASSADOR, WITH WHOM CH'AI ENGAGES IN POLITE EXCHANGES AT PUBLIC EVENTS. HIS RELATIONS WITH SOVIETS AND EAST EUROPEANS ARE CORRECT, BUT NOTICEABLY DISTANT.

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7. WHILE CH'AI DID NOT JOIN THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS TO GREET VICE PRESIDENT MONDALE WHEN THE LATTER ARRIVED IN BANGKOK MAY 4, HE ACCEPTED AN INVITATION FROM THE AMBASSADOR TO A FAREWELL LUNCH MAY 9. CONVERSATION AT LUNCH WAS CASUAL AND NOT RPT NOT SUBSTANTIVE. HOWEVER, DURING HIS REMARKS IN PRESENTING A TOAST HE NOTED IN LOW KEY, NON-POLEMIC MANNER LACK OF FORMAL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN U.S. AND PRC AND EXPRESSED HOPE FOR IMPROVEMENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH SHANGHAI COMMUNIQUE. HE SAID HE HOPED FULL NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS WOULD BE ACHIEVED DURING HIS TENURE IN WASHINGTON, BUT HE ADDED THAT EVENTS HAVE THEIR OWN MOMENTUM AND SAID THAT THIS MAY NOT RPT NOT BE POSSIBLE.

8. THE BANGKOK PRESS PROMINENTLY FEATURED A WARM BEARHUG AND SMILING GREETING BY CH'AI OF VIETNAMESE AMBASSADOR HOANG BAO SON WHEN HE ARRIVED APRIL 19 IN BANGKOK. THE
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TWO AMBASSADORS WERE COLLEAGUES WHEN BOTH WERE ASSIGNED TO BUDAPEST IN THE EARLY SIXTIES. POSSIBLY WITH PEKING'S REACTION IN MIND, BECAUSE OF THE CURRENT TENSIONS IN PEKING-HANOI RELATIONS, CH'AI IS KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN EMBARRASSED BY THE PROMINENT PRESS COVERAGE OF HIS GREETING OF AMBASSADOR SON.

9. CH'AI APPARENTLY HAD NO CONNECTIONS WITH THE "GANG OF FOUR". WHEN RUMOR MILLS IN BANGKOK PREDICTED THAT HE MIGHT BE RECALLED WHEN THE "GANG OF FOUR" FELL FROM GRACE IN CHINA, CH'AI'S DEPUTY TOLD CONFIDANTS IN BANGKOK NOT TO WORRY SINCE AMBASSADOR CH'AI HAD BEEN APPOINTED PRIOR TO (FORMER) FONMIN CH'IAO KUAN-HUA'S REIGN AT THE MOFA IN PEKING.

10. AMBASSADOR CH'AI, ABOUT SIXTY, IS A NATIVE OF SHENSI

PROVINCE. HE SPEAKS MANDARIN WITH A VERY HEAVY PROVINCIAL ACCENT. HIS VOICE IS VERY LOW AND AT TIMES NEARLY INAUDIBLE. HE APPARENTLY DOES NOT SPEAK OR UNDERSTAND ENGLISH. HE SMOKES. HIS WIFE, LI YU-FENG, SPEAKS MANDARIN CLEARLY, BUT APPARENTLY NO FOREIGN LANGUAGES. SHE ACCOMPANIES AMBASSADOR CH'AI ON OCCASION SOCIALLY. SHE APPEARS SOMEWHAT YOUNGER THAN THE AMBASSADOR. WHILE FRIENDLY AND NOT UNCOMFORTABLE IN DIPLOMATIC SURROUNDINGS, SHE CONTRIBUTES LITTLE TO THE CONVERSATION. AS FAR AS WE KNOW, SHE DID NOT WORK REGULARLY AT THE PRC EMBASSY. AMBASSADOR CH'AI TOLD US HE HAS GORWN CHILDREN WORKING IN PEKING. HE EXPRESSED DOUBT THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO VISIT HIM IN WASHINGTON, AS THE TRIP WOULD BE "TOO FAR."

11. ONE OF CH'AI'S AIDES CONFIDED RECENTLY TO THE CHINESE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, AND CH'AI HAS NOW CONFIRMED PUBLICLY, THAT HE WILL BE REPLACED IN BANGKOK BY CHANG WEI-LIEH
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(1728/0251/3525), CURRENTLY AMBASSADOR TO THE MONGOLIAN PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC IN ULAN BATOR. CHANG IS A NATIVE OF CANTON. HE WAS THE FIRST PRC GOVERNOR OF HAINAN ISLAND, PRIOR TO ENTERING THE CHINESE DIPLOMATIC SERVICE. CHANG SERVED AS AMBASSADOR TO IRAQ AND AS CHARGE IN THE PRC EMBASSY IN MOSCOW.

12. FOR PEKING - IN COURSE OF LUNCH MAY 9 AMBASSAODR ASKED CH'AI IF HE HAD HAD OPPORTUNITY TO READ UP ON THE UNITED STATES. HE REPLIED THAT HE HAD BEEN TOO BUSY SAYING GOOD-BYE TO THAILAND (HE IS BEING LIONIZED BY SENIOR THAI GOVERNMENT FIGURES AND CHINESE COMMUNITY.). CH'AI SAID THAT HE PLANNED TO RETURN TO PEKING BEFORE PROCEEDING TO WASHINGTON AND SAID HE WOULD CALL ON AMBASSADOR WOODCOCK. BELIEVE HE WOULD APPRECIATE IT IF USLO HAS SUITABLE PRESENTATION BOOK ON U.S. IN CHINESE WHICH AMBASSADOR WOODCOCK COULD PRESENT IN COURSE OF CALL.

WHITEHOUSE

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